

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5525

As Passed House - Amended:

April 22, 2009

Title: An act relating to rental vouchers to allow release from state institutions.

Brief Description: Concerning rental vouchers to allow release from state institutions.

Sponsors: Senators Carrell, Hargrove, Stevens, Regala, Brandland, Kauffman and McAuliffe.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services: 3/23/09, 3/26/09 [DPA];

Ways & Means: 4/2/09, 4/16/09 [DPA(WAYS w/o HS)].

Floor Activity

Passed House - Amended: 4/22/09, 54-43.

Brief Summary of Bill (As Amended by House)

- Permits the Department of Corrections (Department) to provide rental vouchers to an offender for a period not to exceed three months in rental assistance if it will result in an approved release plan.
- Requires that the voucher must be provided in conjunction with additional transition support programming or services.
- Requires the Department to collect data and to report on the rental voucher program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Dickerson, Chair; Orwall, Vice Chair; Dammeier, Ranking Minority Member; Green, Morrell, O'Brien and Walsh.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Klippert.

Staff: Linda Merelle (786-7092)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Ways & Means and without amendment by Committee on Human Services. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Ericks, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Dammeier, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cody, Conway, Darneille, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunt, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Pettigrew, Seaquist and Sullivan.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Priest, Ross and Schmick.

Staff: Alex MacBain (786-7288)

Background:

An offender incarcerated within a Department of Corrections (DOC) facility may, through a program called earned early release, reduce his or her time of incarceration upon demonstrating good behavior. Depending upon the crime and the offender's risk classification, he or she may receive from 10 to 50 percent of time off his or her sentence.

An offender convicted of a sex offense, a violent offense, a crime against persons, or a drug crime may be eligible to be released to community custody instead of earned early release. The DOC may deny transfer of an offender to community custody if the offender does not have an approved release plan. A release plan must contain a proposed place of residence and living arrangements. If the DOC determines that the proposed plan may violate the offender's condition of sentence, may place the offender at risk to reoffend, or may compromise community safety, the DOC will not approve the plan. In this event, the offender will remain incarcerated until the DOC approves a new release plan or the offender reaches the end of his or her sentence.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The DOC may place an offender on partial confinement and/or provide rental vouchers to an offender for up to three months if rental assistance will enable the offender to have an approved release plan. The voucher must be provided in conjunction with additional transition support programming or services that enable an offender to participate in services, including, but not limited to, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, sex offender treatment, education programming, or employment training. The DOC is required to collect data regarding the housing status of offenders who receive rental vouchers and to report to the Legislature regarding the number of vouchers issued and other information to assist in the evaluation of the program. The DOC must collect data regarding the housing status of offenders who receive rental vouchers and report to the Legislature regarding the number of vouchers issued, sanctions imposed upon offenders who have received the vouchers, and other information to assist the Legislature in the evaluation of the rental voucher program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately, except for section 2 which reinstates prior law related to the provisions regarding when an offender may leave the DOC before his or her sentence is ended, after a scheduled expiration and takes effect August 1, 2009.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Human Services):

(In support) The purpose of the savings in this bill is to honor our word to an offender when we say that you have actually earned an early release. This bill is based upon the assumption that there are approximately 800 felons, 75 percent of offenders at their early release date, who should be released but are not because they do not have rental money. The intention of this bill is to make sure that those released are not released under a bridge. It is important to make sure that the most important factor regarding recidivism is taken care of. Recidivism is much higher if offenders are released into shelters or homelessness. While a short-term rental system is important, there are some in need of longer terms. The Community, Trade and Economic Development program has been up and running for more than one year. The DOC has, in the past, had a 24-month pilot for offender re-entry. This bill does not take the place of that program, but it is a good compromise to keep offenders from being homeless.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):

(In support) This bill is good policy and saves the state money. There are many offenders who are being kept in prison well beyond their release date due to lack of a housing plan. This will provide cost savings and honors our word. Three months of vouchers is a short enough period of time to help someone get established in the community, but not so long that it would be abused. The local police tell us that the last thing that you want is an offender being homeless because this leads to more instability. Half of the felons re-arrested for new crimes were homeless at the time that the crime was committed. It would be good to clarify with the DOC that maybe not all of these offenders would also require electronic home monitoring.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Human Services): Senator Carrell, prime sponsor; Mia Wells and Seth Dawson, Washington State Coalition for the Homeless; Greg Provazano, Columbia Legal Services; and Nick Federici, United Way of King County and Washington Low-Income Housing Alliance.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): (In support) Senator Carrell, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): None.